PRIZE GIVING SPEECH - 2011

Madam Chairman, special guests, Governors, ladies and gentlemen, members of staff past and present, and students, both past and present, I am delighted to welcome you all to our annual Prize Giving held, as has become traditional, in the magnificent setting of the Liverpool Cathedral.

Once again, I will try to attempt to recognise just some of the achievements of our Belvedere Girls as we reflect on the 2010/11 Academic Year.

But before we begin I would like to welcome to the cathedral and, indeed, to our great city of Liverpool, the Chief Executive of Girls Days School Trust, Helen Fraser.

As you will see from your programme notes, Helen joined the GDST as Chief Executive in January 2010 after almost 40 years in book publishing, most recently as managing director of Penguin books.

Helen won a scholarship to Oxford where she read English Language and Literature, leaving with a first class degree in 1970. She was awarded a CBE for Services to Publishing in the New Years Honours of 2010 and now leads the GDST who are the largest single educator of girls in the UK with 24 outstanding girls’ independent schools and two equally outstanding Academies, Belvedere and Birkenhead. The GDST is also the largest educational charity in the country.
Helen, welcome to Belvedere’s Prize Giving and thank you for giving up the time from your incredibly busy schedule to be our special guest.

After the upheaval of recent years with the change to Academy status, the extensive building programme, the development of the curriculum offer, the appointment of new teaching and support staff, to say nothing of our successful applications for Investors in People, Inclusion Charter Mark, Artsmark Gold, the International Schools Award, and our outstanding Ofsted inspection of last year, some of us were hoping for a quieter, perhaps more ‘normal’ year in 2010/11.

However, those of you who know this school will realise that Belvedere doesn’t have quieter, ‘normal’ years.

The Belvedere Academy has become such a hive of activity, innovation and energy that it is difficult to keep up with what’s happening in a single week, never mind a whole year.

So once again, as I attempt in vain to sum up a year in the life of this wonderful, unique school, I apologise without reservation to all the people and events I miss out during my review of just some of the highlights of the last academic year.

I would like to begin, as ever, with our examination results.
**Examination Results**

Once again, I am delighted to report excellent examination results at both GCSE and A level and to be able to confirm that the traditions of Belvedere in terms of outcomes and standards are being maintained by the present staff and students.

At GCSE, almost 50% of all grades were at Grade A*/A with three quarters of all grades at A*-B. 96% of students achieved 5 A*-C including English and Maths.

What is particularly impressive is that, overall, the girls exceeded their targets at GCSE by 16% - in other words, the MiDYIS target for Year 11 was 80% 5 A*-C including English and maths and the girls achieved 96% – a fantastic achievement.

At A level, there was a 99% pass rate with 61% of all grades at A*-B. Most of our Year 13 students achieved their target grades and UCAS offers and are now well into their degree courses at Universities across the country. I am delighted that some have been able to join us today.

The summer examination series also produced some very positive early indicators as to the eventual KS4 outcomes of our first full Academy intake, who have now reached Year 11.

For example, in English Language all students were entered for the full unit 1 of the AQA GCSE and 93% gained a grade C or better with 31% gaining either A* or A.
In Maths, 81% of our new Year 11 students have already secured at least a grade C with grades certain to rise this year.

In Modern Foreign Languages, we have introduced fast track courses and 79 students now in Yr 11 were entered for French, with 70 securing a C or better when they were in Year 10. Of all grades, 23% were awarded at A or A*. This is a superb achievement for students entered for a language in Year 10. The girls have now moved into their second MFL GCSE in Spanish which they will sit this year, at the end of which should ensure that around 65% of our current Year 11 will secure two GCSE grades A*-C in two foreign languages, a rare achievement in schools nowadays.

Also, during their Year 10, 109 girls passed full course Citizenship, with 31% of all grades at A*/A.

Finally, as in previous years most of the Year 10 students were entered for the OCR equivalent GCSE examination and 112 gained a distinction, which is the equivalent of a grade A at GCSE.

Our current Year 11, therefore, have done exceptionally well so far and already have some excellent qualifications – I look forward to reporting on their final GCSE performance next year.

Part of the reason for our successful examination performance last year was the introduction of our additional study programme organised by my Associate Principal Mr Irwin which ran during the final week of the Easter Holidays, during Whit Half Term and on several Saturdays to support Year 10-13 examination students.
The sessions were very well supported and attendance at most was excellent. I should like to take this opportunity to thank Mr Irwin, teaching staff, pupils and parents for their support of this initiative, which, I am pleased to confirm, will run again this year.

**Enrichment**

Our Enrichment Programme continues to be a massive strength of the Academy and permeates all that we do. From foreign trips to Barcelona, Paris and Italy for the study of languages or an opportunity to learn how to ski; from a visit to Wimbledon to see the likes of Federer and Nadal in action to the now annual theatre visit to London to see top shows such as Blood Brothers, The 39 Steps, Dirty Dancing and Shrek the Musical in the space of just two days, not forgetting the stage combat workshop led by professional actors and a stage combat professional; from Geography in Snowdonia, History in Conway, and local trips to LIPA, Anfield Stadium and the Slavery Museum, once again, Belvedere Girls were everywhere last year!

In addition to all the trips and visits, the clubs on offer each day at Belvedere as part of our internal Enrichment programme continues to develop in response to the ever increasing demand of our growing number on roll. Cartoon Club, Science Experiment Club, and the Duke of Edinburgh Award remain highly popular and new clubs such as Spanish Cookery, Zumba and Thinking out of the box club are springing up all the time.
May I take this opportunity to thank, on behalf of both the staff and the girls, all the parents who not only manage to find the money to allow the girls to attend trips away from school but who constantly ferry them from A to B, bringing their daughters to the Academy in the early hours or collecting them late at night.

I think our parents deserve a round of applause from both the girls and the staff for their patience, generosity and ongoing support.

APPLAUSE

The development of our facilities

We continue to develop and make improvements to the fabric of our accommodation and buildings. We have embarked upon a major suite of works in the House 11 area of the Academy and the Technology department has now been brought up to date with new flooring, new windows, new electrics and a complete re-decoration. We have also invested heavily in new ICT infrastructure for this area of the school and I am delighted to say that it has now been brought into the 21st Century! We have also appointed a new member of the Technology team, Mr Dykeaylen, to start the delivery of the new subject of Graphics in Technology. This is an exciting new curriculum development which we are certain will enthuse and inspire Belvedere Girls in the coming years.

We have also invested in improving our dining facilities and our new, chic cafe-style eating area is now open and proving very popular with the students and staff alike! The Sixth Form
girls have also benefitted from an improved dining area as we continue to develop all aspects of the Sixth Form accommodation including new study spaces, improved ICT facilities, new furniture in our dedicated Sixth Form teaching rooms, new social spaces and even new furniture in the library to help make long hours of ‘slog’ seem that bit more bearable! Our facilities are now excellent across the Academy and my thanks go to our Estates team, John, Terry and Mick who work exceptionally hard to ensure that the Academy remains in outstanding condition at all times.

I should now like to move onto our subject reports.

**English**

Results in English were fantastic this year with 100% of both A Level and GCSE students achieving A*-C in both English Language and Literature. The numbers taking the curriculum area’s three subjects at AS are rising year on year, with Media and English Language proving to be increasingly popular.

Numbers continue to grow for GCSE Media as the popularity of this subject increases. Key Stage 4 and 5 Media students took part in National Schools’ Film Week which allowed the pupils to watch films from other cultures and take part in discussions with industry professionals afterwards.

The department’s English Language Day, a day devoted to the celebration of varieties of English, proved a great success,
with all students’ English lessons being transformed into sessions on English through the Ages, with teachers being transformed into a medieval knight, an Elizabethan lady-in-waiting, a Victorian school mistress, a Teddy girl and a live, walking and talking Facebook page. Topics included the writing of Victorian courtship letters, deportment and elocution, and how to deliver a medieval insult - always a useful skill to have in Liverpool.

The English staff will take any excuse to get dressed up so to celebrate World Book Day in March the English department led the whole school in a day of appreciation for literary characters. Staff dressed up as a range of their fictional favourites including Miss Havisham, Anne of Green Gables, Captain Hook, Robin Hood, Harry Potter and even Where’s Wally, although he kept going missing. Students were encouraged to take part in a competition to guess who their teachers were dressed as and the Teachers’ Prize for Best Dressed went to Mr Halsall for his amazing portrayal of The Cat in the Hat.

For the third year running, an A Level student from Belvedere became a finalist in a city-wide competition to become The Athenaeum Writer in Residence. Katie Oliver received the First Runner-Up prize and, as the judges felt that it was such a close call, Katie was asked to read her entry on local radio along with the winner.

Our annual Spelling Bee is going from strength to strength with the Year 7 and 8 students in each colour group practising hard each year to be crowned with the ‘Best Speller’ title.
Each student is asked to spell out loud the spellings they have learnt throughout the year with some tough tie-breakers given in the final round. This year’s Year 7 champion was Olivia Rowley and for Year 8 it was Olivia Sephton.

Year 8 Gifted and Talented pupils were given the opportunity to work with industry professionals at a specially arranged session on stop-motion animation at FACT. Students created animated war films based on the war poetry they had been studying in their English lessons. This relationship with FACT has now progressed and some KS3 students are now working on a cross-curricular project with the Art department and FACT on a weekly basis.

Science

As well as annual events such as the visit to “Science Live” at the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester for Year 11 students and the Year 12 Biology field trip to Malham Tarn; the Science Faculty has continued to embrace many of the national Science initiatives over the year and provided an excellent range of out of classroom activities which have enriched the students’ learning experiences. In March, for National Science and Engineering Week there were a host of activities and competitions for the girls to become involved in, along with the ever popular explosions and demonstrations including the flaming hands of Mrs Everett. Year 9 students took part in the national Biology Challenge with many successes, most notably Blessing Opowole who achieved a silver award.
In May, a group of Year 8 girls were accompanied by Mr. Caulfield to the IET Engineering Challenge at Liverpool University Electrical Engineering Department. The girls had to work as a team and design a system that would remotely transport and object and place it in a specified section of a model human body. The Belvedere Academy team were outright winners against some very talented teams from other schools in Merseyside. Feedback from the organisers was very positive and praise was given to the girls for being excellent ambassadors of The Belvedere Academy Faculty of Science. Professor Spencer and Grace Carradice (an Engineering undergraduate) came into our whole academy assembly to award the prizes, certificates and the trophy, as well as talking to all of the students about the exciting opportunities and careers open to those with a degree in engineering. Congratulations to the winning team - Bethan Muirhead, Eloise Morris, Sofia Berndt, Octavia Ferns, Maira Malik and Erin Chamberlain

A fantastic cross-curricular day for Year 8 – “The School of Rock” was introduced in June. Science and Geography teachers worked together to provide a day of exciting lessons which enabled the students to have fun whilst still learning lots about rocks.

Maths

Maths continues to be a real strength at Belvedere which is shown by excellent examination results each year. Last year was no exception, with outstanding results in Year 13 where 78% of the girls studying Maths at A level achieved either an
A* to B grade with Magdelene Teh achieving A* at both A level Maths and Further Maths and Ninghui Shi achieving an A* in A level Maths in Year 12. At GCSE 97% of our girls achieved an A*-C grade in Maths.

Other activities in Maths included our girls achieving a record number of Golds in the UK Maths Challenge; taking part in a World Maths Day online global literacy challenge and contributing to the achievement of a world record for the number of mental maths problems solved in 24 hours, and the hosting of a Maths Conference attended by other Liverpool Schools and led by a speaker from Bristol University.

(ICT)

ICT entered a total of 193 students from Years 10 and 11 for a new qualification called the OCR national First Award at Level 2. This proved a tremendously effective innovation with 181 gaining a Grade A or Distinction and 11 students gaining a B. At A2 50% of the group gained an A and a number have now progressed to study the subject further at A level.

Lifeskills

Last year saw the largest ever Belvedere Academy Careers Fair with over 50 careers represented, from medics, lawyers and architects to aroma-therapists, event planners and fashion designers.

Last year also saw a move to a new work experience provider, which ensured all y10 students had a quality work experience
placement. The week went exceptionally well, and feedback from the girls and employers was extremely positive.

Y11 also had the opportunity to spend a week or two on a placement at the end of term, and those that did found they developed a range of skills, and in many cases the experience helped them to decide on future pathways for careers.

We have also continued to develop our links with outside agencies, and regularly work with a number of local businesses, Liverpool Magistrates courts, Liverpool City Council, MPs and Council Members, Liverpool University students and charities such as The Red Cross and Oxfam, all of whom now work with the department to enhance the curriculum either by running workshops, coming into lessons or providing resources to offer an alternative learning experience. We have also had first aid training for Year 8, driving lessons for Year 12 and lessons in pedestrian skills for Year 7.

**Creative Arts**

The Art Department had an extremely successful year, particularly in terms of examination results in which 100% of candidates achieved A*-C at GCSE and 100% achieved a remarkable A*-B at A level. Art is a particularly strong subject at A level across the GDST and A level Art at Belvedere was second across all Trust schools for value added, an outstanding achievement.

The high standard of our students’ G.C.S.E. and A Level examination work was evident in the Art Department’s end of
year exhibition which showcased the girls’ work in art to great effect.

Our Year 12 Art pupils have been involved in a fascinating combined Art and Science project in which researchers from the Biomedical Research Centre based in the Royal Liverpool University Hospital and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine came together with our students to develop a range of exciting sculptural representations of their scientific research.

The sculptures and their accompanying sketches and videos were exhibited at the World Museum in Liverpool and the Director of the World Museum, said that the exhibition was one of the best he had seen. Recently, the exhibition travelled to the Royal Hospital where it was shown in the foyer of the hospital to similar acclaim.

We were also delighted to secure our first set of Textiles GCSE results this year where 100% of all grades were A*-C with two thirds being either A* or A, an amazing achievement for the girls and their teacher Miss Jones. We are now looking forward to offering Textiles as an A level subject next year for the first time in Belvedere.

MFL

As our main specialism it is so pleasing to note that the Modern Languages Department is now going from strength to strength.
The year began by welcoming two new colleagues, Mr McGovern and Miss Barry who made an immediate impact on the department with their excellent language skills, energy and enthusiasm.

The profile of the department was raised throughout the Academy during a very successful Languages Festival Week which was arranged to coincide with the European Day of Languages. During the week staff and students celebrated the importance of languages with a range of activities including competitions, quizzes, flamenco lessons, MFL Karaoke and even a visit from “All Things Latin” which had the girls drumming and salsa dancing.

There were, of course, several exciting trips to various European destinations including Paris and Barcelona, and our 6th Formers enjoyed periods of work experience in France and Spain.

We also entertained visitors from oversees including a group of 30 students from Valencia who spent a day in Key Stage 3 classes. This was an extremely popular visit with the girls, perhaps due to the fact that around 20 of the visitors were boys.

Following much hard work, including Saturday morning and Easter revision classes, MFL’s examinations were amongst their best ever at GCSE and A level.
Performing Arts

Drama and the Performing Arts in general are now developing rapidly at Belvedere, and taking full advantage of our now outstanding facilities for these subjects.

In Drama, two new members of staff, Mrs Cox and Miss O’Shea have joined Miss Poole to create an exciting department which has introduced new examination courses such as Performing Arts and Dance GCSEs. They regularly take students to the theatre on both a local and national basis, have hosted theatre workshops with industry professionals and introduced new Enrichment activities such as improvisation, Tech Team, Yoga, Podcasting and Scriptwriting.

A highlight of the year was the Belvedere Academy performing Arts Showcase which performed to sell out audiences in two evenings in May.

The audience were genuinely amazed by the quality of the performances which included Music, dance, drama and gymnastics, and ranged from Yr 12 students giving a short performance of John Godber’s “Shakers” and the Chamber Choir singing a Disney medley to an entrancing gymnastics display by Year 7 and Year 10 students performing a Victoria Wood comedy sketch.

The annual Drama Festival is a Belvedere tradition which has been running successfully for many years. Every form in Years 7-9 is asked to perform a short play in front of all Key
Stage 3 students and each play is directed and produced by a team of Year 12 students.

Last year the Festival was won by 7J, whose performance of Dracula Spectacular stood out against some really high quality competition. Professional sound and light engineers were hired for both the rehearsals and final performances and added hugely to the quality and professionalism of the final performance, using our new equipment to the full potential.

Rehearsals are underway for this year’s dance festival which takes place on 15th December and I can already sense the anticipation amongst the girls as they prepare for this year’s competition.

Without doubt, one of the highlights of last year was the Academy’s production of ‘Annie’ which played to packed houses on June 22nd and 23rd. This was a truly outstanding production with a dazzling cast of dancers, singers, musicians and actors who rehearsed for months in preparation for the big nights. The cast was led by 12 year old Jiordan Hadley who gave a remarkable performance as Annie, showing considerable acting and singing skills as well as an infectious enthusiasm for the production which inspired the rest of the team. Jiordan was brilliantly supported by Megan McCarthy who played the tyrannical Miss Hannigan to almost professional standard and by two enthusiastic members of the teaching staff; Mr McGovern, who played Miss Hannigan’s brother, ‘Rooster’ and Mr Marshall who played the billionaire ‘Daddy Warbucks’. Both received rave reviews and received an honorary ‘Oscar’ at our summer awards assembly. Both
teachers now dream of a Hollywood career but the Drama staff are working hard to keep them grounded.

The production also contained an outstanding performance from the orchestra, led by Miss Bell, who played the score to perfection, enhancing the atmosphere and professionalism of the musical through live accompaniment as opposed to a recorded soundtrack.

To me, perhaps the highlight of this show were the chorus of orphans, all from Key Stage 3, who performed the number ‘It’s a hard knock life’ to such a standard that it would not have been out of place on the West End.

The production has left a huge impression on all those involved and on all those lucky enough to be able to say, I was there! After the second night’s performance, a retired headteacher, who has been coming to Belvedere and other schools to see shows for many years said to me “That is, without doubt, the best school show I have ever seen.”

I have already said that music played a key role in the production of Annie but the music department contributes a lot more to the Academy throughout the Academic Year.

Both Senior and Junior Orchestras performed at the Carol Service last December here in the Cathedral and played again at the Performing Arts Showcase performing a film inspired programme including music from Pirates of the Caribbean, Jurassic Park and music from the Bond film ‘Nobody does it Better.’ The choirs sang beautifully at the same event and
there were stunning solo performances from some of our most talented musicians.

It is exciting to see how the Performing Arts Department is coming together and beginning to work collaboratively as well as individually to bring out the extraordinary artistic talents of some of our girls here at Belvedere. It is also exciting to see our new facilities being used extensively to develop the Arts at Belvedere and we very much look forward to what they come up with this year. I think that all our performers, including the orchestra and choir here today, deserve a huge round of applause.

APPLAUSE

PE

Last year saw the retirement of one of Belvedere’s and GDST’s longest serving member of staff, Mrs Jan Davies, Head of PE, who said an emotional goodbye to Belvedere after 31 years as both student and then teacher.

Jan certainly left in a blaze of glory after a remarkably successful year for PE where the girls achieved outstanding success in so many areas.

In Netball, the first team were champions of the Liverpool Teachers Association City Tournament and runners up in the County Tournament after competing against the top teams from Sefton, Knowsley, St Helens and Liverpool.
The Year 10 team also did brilliantly ending the season as Liverpool Teachers Association Tournament Champions and Liverpool League Champions, and the Year 9 team claimed the League Championship in their age group.

In Rounders our Year 10 girls were Liverpool City Rounders Champions and in Badminton our KS3 team were Liverpool School Sports Partnership South and South Central Team Champions.

In Volleyball, a relatively new sport at Belvedere being led by the Danish national coach Tony Westman, we claimed a remarkable 1st, 2nd and 3rd place in the Liverpool Festival.

I think we should recognise the outstanding achievements of our sports teams by giving them a huge round of applause.

**APPLAUSE**

If you add trampolining, dance, fitness in our fully equipped fitness suite, zumba, cheerleading, gymnastics, tag rugby introduced by Mr Austin, table tennis and tennis to the list of activities, you get some idea of how the range of sport now available at Belvedere and how busy our PE staff, now led by Miss Bell, are on a daily basis.

**Operation Christmas Child**

For the last 5 years we have been collecting Christmas shoe boxes for needy children which are shipped out to some of the toughest parts of the world including Haiti and parts of Africa. Last year due to the efforts of the whole school (parents, teachers, SMT, pupils and support staff) we collected a
staggering 568 boxes. This, we were told by the area organiser, was one of the highest totals in Merseyside. The form that collects the most shoe boxes visits the shoe box factory as part of their prize. Last year this was won by a Year 13 form class who spent an afternoon with dedicated volunteers learning all about the charity and helping to pack boxes ready for shipping. It was an invaluable experience for our girls who were fantastic ambassadors for the Belvedere Academy.

I also have some news which is hot of the press (or breaking news as the media now say), that this year’s total, after a slow start is an amazing 684 boxes which organisers say is the highest total on Merseyside. Thanks go to Mrs Garlic for organising this and the girls and parents for supporting this initiative.

I think everybody involved in this amazing feat deserves another round of applause.

APPLAUSE

Schools’ Question Time

Last year saw The Belvedere Academy’s first entry into the BBC’s School Question Time competition. From conception through to completion the commitment and hard work invested by Ms Pryce and the SQT team was remarkable. This whole Academy event involved pupils throughout all year groups who contributed insightful and challenging questions
on a range of local, national and international issues. A number of pupils were then selected to direct their questions to a panel which consisted of local MPs, writers and council members. The issues which arose resulted in a stimulating and heated debate involving many of our pupils who communicated their points in an articulate and informed manner. A tremendous amount of hard work and organisation was required for this event which was filmed in our drama studio and attended by BBC judges. It all paid off as Belvedere was named as one of the BBC’s four winning schools and outright winner for the North West. As a result of this success, two of our students joined David Dimbleby and the Question Time Team for a workshop in May and were given the opportunity to see behind the scenes of a production of Question Time in July.

Conclusion

So ladies and gentlemen, there we have it. A snapshot of another amazing year in the life of Belvedere, still going strong after over 130 years and becoming stronger all the time.

The year after next we will reach our maximum of around 860 girls and our original Academy intake will complete their Year 13 and prepare to go off to university. Their first task, however, is to take their GCSE examinations and, hopefully, equal the fantastic achievements of their selected predecessors, setting the standard for future year groups.
I should like to thank Helen Fraser and the GDST, the Academy Trust Board and Local Governing Body for their support and for all the work they do behind the scenes. I should also, once again, like to thank our parents for the ongoing support and encouragement they provide for their daughters in so many ways during the academic year. And I should like to take this opportunity to thank our fantastic staff, both teaching and support staff, who work so hard to provide the very best educational experience possible for the students of Belvedere. Girls, I think you owe your teachers and the support staff a round of applause!

APPLAUSE

On a personal note I should like to thank my brilliant SMT, Mr Irwin, Mr McGarry, Mrs Cliffe and Mrs Jones for their incredible hard work and support; my PA, Mrs Nalis who is also our Administration Manager and does an outstanding job keeping both myself and the Academy organised, our Finance Director, Mrs Donnelly who makes sure our spending is controlled and our resources are used wisely; our ICT Network Manager, Mr Marsland who has brought Belvedere’s ICT facilities into the modern world and our Office Manager and support staff governor, Mrs Collin who manages our general office and reprographics facility with incredible efficiency and commitment.

And finally, I should like to leave you with the words of the Good Schools’ Guide who paid us a visit last year. This is
what the Good Schools Guide thought of Belvedere; in their words not mine:

“The ethos of the ‘Belvedere Girl’ is promoted from the start by staff and the older girls; this encapsulates the GDST values of hard work, respect for teachers, leadership qualities and pride in one’s school. It is perfectly acceptable to be clever and industrious; the girls don’t feel unduly pressurised but are encouraged to do their best saying “They want us to do well – if we do our best, they’re happy.” An exciting and inspiring enterprise, it’s now the school everyone wants their daughter to go to in Liverpool.”

I couldn’t have put it better myself.

Thank You